

Dr Harry goes to Grantham: a momentary perspective on narrative construction, omission & interpretation

Abstract

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This paper takes its central idea as ‘the moment’: a point in time of subjective duration when we experience conscious mental awareness of what is going on within our mind and around us, and we are able to remember our thinking and responses. Such moments form essential human experiences from which meaning is generated and stories are created.

Narratives of all kinds – personal, organisational, factual and fictional – often hinge on ‘critical moments’ in which significant ‘turning points’ and realisations conveying wider meanings may occur. This can be seen in a range of genres, from literature, organisational narratives and ethnographies, personal biographies and increasingly in the use of narratives to understand human cognition and consciousness. This paper aims to connect understandings from literature, philosophy and neuroscience, and to suggest ways in which ‘the moment’ can be understood and used in storied research.

The construction of stories which hinge on critical moments relies on the use of ‘Kairotic’ (narrative) rather than ‘Chronos’ (sequential) time in the process of human recollection which creates narratives (Czarniawska, 2004). A Kairotic narrative connects what are retrospectively perceived to be significant moments into a plausible and coherent narrative. Yet this is inevitably a selective authorial process, where events, interactions and interpretations which are omitted represent an ‘untold story’, a shadow narrative which may be significant and more ‘true’ than what is told. Yet the moment when a listener recognises that an ‘untold story’ is hidden in the shadow of the told may become a significant point in its interpretation.

The paper outlines the significance of ‘the moment’ from a cultural perspective in literary and philosophical theory, summarising and making connections between a range of related domains of knowledge in philosophy, literature and narrative, social education, psychology and cognition, and learning. It deploys a short story to demonstrate the use of such moments and to explore the symbolic importance of the moment in narrative construction. This introduces a discussion of the contentious questions of whether such a story should, or should not be told; and of whether, once told it can be ‘untold’.

Keywords: Narrative, stories, moment, organisation.

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Introduction

This paper explores the concept of the 'untold story' from a momentary perspective; that is, it aims to show how a single moment can become the turning point in constructing a narrative, and how the telling or untelling of this element of a story can have moral, political and social dimensions and consequences.

This paper first explores the role of 'the moment' in organisational storytelling, and introduces how interpreting the significance of the moment can draw on a diverse set of influences from a range of literatures including philosophy, narrative, organisational, psychology, and even neuroscience.

It then deploys a short story to demonstrate the use of such moments and to explore the symbolic importance of the moment in narrative construction. This introduces a discussion of the contentious questions of whether such a story should, or should not be told; and of whether, once told it can be 'untold'. Storytelling (and writing) can be risky and morally hazardous; yet not telling stories can be freighted with similar consequences, and the paper concludes by highlighting these dilemmas, and discussing whether such stories should, or indeed can, be 'untold' as well as the implications of their telling, since what is omitted, or untold, may be significant.

The moment in narrative

Considering the wider significance of 'the moment' within the making of meaning and stories, the moment occurs in many aspects of everyday life, yet its definition is elusive, such as 'a turning point in a series of events' (Shorter Oxford Dictionary). Associated words include 'momentary', 'momentous', 'momentum' and others now obsolete. In this paper, the 'moment' is taken as a point in time when we experience conscious mental awareness of what is going on, either within the mind, or around us, and are aware and able to remember our thinking and responses. Its meaning is related to the human experience and generation of meaning in a conscious attention span of subjective duration, rather than a fixed time interval, such as the 'blink' identified by Gladwell (2005). Our experience of lived existence is a sequence of moments, such as Damasio's (2000) understanding of consciousness as 'the movie in the brain'.

Moments are transitory; some bring retrospective realisation that change has occurred through an event carrying significant meaning or enduring consequences, but most are incidental and pass without significance (Bergson, 1911). Incidents and events are extrinsic phenomena which may trigger realisations with individual significance or meaning. A 'critical incident' (Cope, 2005) or 'entrepreneurial event' (Shapero, 1982) is distinct from the cognitive meaning or emotional response it creates in the subjective moment. Concepts connected with understanding of the moment include extrinsic time, context and serendipity, and internal dimensions of memory, emotion, creativity, and learning. As Bergson (1911) observed, the moment does not exist separately from its past, but rather there is a co-existent connection between the present, the past, and the future. Whilst the vast majority of 'endured time' is lived in moments which are neither significant at the time, or memorable in retrospect, a tiny number of incidents are exceptions to this flow of existence, being experienced either at the time or subsequently to be 'momentous'; it

is these which concern us.

The moment is significant in literature; the phrase 'moments of truth' is widely used and has been attributed (possibly erroneously) to the novelist Ernest Hemingway to describe the point at which the matador confronts and kills the bull in a bullfight. But Hemingway certainly incorporated the notion of 'the moment' within the narrative structures of his novels:

'In life people are not conscious of these special moments that novelists build their whole structures on.'

(quote from Hemingway's notes from 'The Sun Also Rises'/Svoboda, 1983:12).

Hemingway was influenced by James Joyce's use of 'epiphanies' in 'Portrait of the Artist' and 'Dubliners' as

'showing forth' of character through seemingly trivial action or detail (Litz, 1966:23).

In a literary sense, the 'epiphany' (from the Greek, 'epiphaneia' or sudden realisation of the larger essence or meaning) is one where a deeper meaning in relation to the personal becomes apparent. There is a distinction between the concept of 'epiphany' used as a structural term in literature to denote authorial meaning, and 'moment' as a term in people's lived experiences when the realisation of significant wider meaning occurs. The two concepts are connected and overlapping but distinct; 'epiphany' is primarily literary, whilst 'moment' is experiential. It is necessary to have experienced the moment to be able to reconstruct it as a narrative epiphany.

Time is an important concept in connecting narrative and the moment. Polkinghorne (1988) considered the role of temporality in narrative through readings of Ricoeur, Husserl, Heidegger and Bergson in phenomenological philosophy. His interpretation explored the distinctions between an objective construction of time as moments interspersed along a geometric line, and understanding human experience through narrative over time, building on Husserl's prior (1928) conceptualisation of consciousness of time as:

'a primal impression of a streaming present surrounded by an awareness of immediate 'retention' of the past and immediate 'protension' of the future'

(Husserl, 1928/Polkinghorne 1988: 128).

Retention is the active recollection of memories and 'protension' the active expectation of imagined results. This moves beyond understanding 'the moment' as simply now, being situated in consciousness between past experience and future anticipation. Referring to organisational narratives, Czarniawska (2004) refers to kairoic (from the Greek god Kairos, of 'right or 'proper' time), or narrative, time, punctuated by events, which may run backward, forward or even stand still, in their historical or social context. Brockmeier (2000) explores the concept of autobiographical time, introducing six different models of autobiographical narrative time construction. The concept of narrative time is of especial importance as a way of creating plots, stories and meanings rather than simply chronicling events in an historical sense.

We can take narratives as central means of making sense of human experience within a schema or sequence of other moments. As well as being retrospective they can also be prospective, building future conjecture based on past experience, such as in the presentation of a business strategy for an organisation. Narratives often use Kairotic time as an organising device, of episodes being organised into a plausible plotline, rather than of strict chronological time. Also, moments are inevitably remembered selectively and often in relation to their context and subsequent significance. Pillemer (1998) identified six functional categories of personal event

memories: memorable messages, symbolic messages, originating events, anchoring events, turning points and analogous events. These are useful categories which are related to memory, narrative and the development of self.

Polkinghorne also referred to Bergson's and James' challenge to the notion of time as a series of instantaneous or momentary 'nows', but rather the 'duration' (*durée*) forming part of the progression of the past into the future:

'The self is duration, a flowing, creative and productive process. Time is not located in an instantaneous moment. Time is a forceful movement that retains its past as it produces a new future' (Polkinghorne 1988: 128).

Polkinghorne connected these philosophical understandings of the moment in time between the largely North American 'pragmatic' school, in particular William James, with European movements, aiming to explain the difference between the representation of time as a mathematical construct, and the human experience of time as 'extended awareness'. Heidegger (1927) referred to the moment of vision as 'ecstasis' which could not be clarified in terms of the 'now', only the future. Amongst extensive writing on the philosophical and sociological importance of time by Weber, GH Mead and others, often centring on the tension between an objective Newtonian 'scientific' time and the subjective time of human experience, Flaherty & Fine (2001) reinterpreted GH Mead's (1932) 'Philosophy of the Present' lectures centring on the experience in the present, in which human action takes place not through conscious interpretation but through actualisation of the trajectory already established by the biographical self:

'the self is more accurately understood as a momentary stance toward past and future events' (Flaherty & Fine 2001:157).

Boje (2012) develops the practice of 'quantum storytelling', away from a Bergsonian 'duration' approach towards a temporality which is *'in-time, as well as in-space, and in-quantum-materiality'* (Boje, 2012:12); for example, he cites:

'Datable moments and events, not in calendar sense or chronology, but that stand out as living stories that are life-changing.....

....Each duration is like the yellow bucket incident I had on my Harley Electroglide while driving 90 mph on the 405 freeway in Las Angeles, between the lanes. The duration of that moment when the bucket jumped out of the back of a pickup truck, and I kept swerving to avoid it, and finally, just throttled all the way up, to meet it head-on, and in that duration, time slowed way down, and I grabbed it by its handle, just before it got under the frame and rear wheels, and everyone in cars and trucks around me, let out a cheer. An event measured in nanoseconds, slowed to what was much longer.' (Boje 2012: 15).

For individuals in an everyday context of conducting their working and private lives, their practices, self and social identities are constantly being affected and reshaped by such moments. Individuals may perceive 'events' as a series of existential moments, most being of little lasting significance but some, either at the time or subsequently, will be recognised as having wider or lasting meaning. The moment is by definition transitory, certain moments bringing a realisation that change has occurred through an event or interaction in which significant meaning is realised or which has enduring consequences. Existentially, being and lived reality are experienced in the moment, and it is in the moment and the perceptions of connections between them that we generate meaning and may decide to act, as creative ideas and realisations occur through

mental association between the lived reality and memory. Existential writers such as Sartre stressed the role of authentic experience, self-actualisation and living in the 'here and now' (Sartre, 1939). Lefebvre (1947) proposed that we seize and act on 'moments' of revelation, emotional clarity and self-presence as the basis for becoming more self-fulfilled. The moment may have philosophical dimensions, sometimes historically significant, for example at times of 'crisis' which prompt a re-evaluation of established praxis.

Some moments can be emancipatory, enabling critiques of praxis to emerge, resulting in the creation of new categories of meaning and values. A 'new reality' can be recognised in a revelatory moment which makes sense of individual or shared experience by accommodating and adapting prior knowledge, and possibly forming a working or lay theory, such as the notion of 'the new normal'. Such creative, constructionist associations enable the creation of new meaning and movement from periods of crisis and profound re-adjustment which affect us personally, institutionally, economically and societally. But the meanings we adduce from making sense of such moments may not be logically coherent and consistent, and we may attribute disproportionate significance to them. Balanced retrospection and critical reflection are needed, before the moment is allowed to pass into the *durée* of history.

Qualitative research methodology has recently addressed the concept of narrative moments; Carlsen and Dutton (2011) gathered accounts from researchers of creative, 'generative moments' in their work, and summarised these thematically as: 'Seeing anew, feeling despair and movement; daring to engage; interrelating; and playing with artefacts', illustrating their operation in idea-changes and self-change (Carlsen and Dutton, 2011: 216). This position helps to inform this paper in justifying the selection of moments as research material, in which the researcher moved and dodged between these themes.

Finally, in exploring connections between Wittgenstein's philosophy and writing about managing and the production of a 'third kind of knowledge' from a social constructionist perspective, Shotter (2005) used the notion of moment-by-moment production of dialogically structured knowledge centring on grounded practices to describe the formative function of language. This again expands the role of narrative in (re)constructing reality:

'The very vagueness, ambiguity, and incompleteness that makes 'scientific' analysis seem hopeless, in fact allows for the moment-by-moment versatility, flexibility, and negotiability that we need in our talk, if we are to make clear the this or that to which at each moment we are referring.' (Shotter 2005: 159).

Philosophy, notably from the phenomenological, pragmatic and existentialist movements, provided early and illuminating insights into the 'problem' of time and past, future and present moments. Many of these insights remain valid observations on the human condition. However, cognitive science increasingly offers understanding of neural networks, processing and how brain function operates in momentary operations which complement, and to some extent supersede philosophical conclusions (Beeman & Kounios, 2009). Feeling and emotion are increasingly understood as highly significant in both cognition and momentary responses (e.g. Damasio, 2000; 2012; Lewis, 2004). Neuroscience has enabled understanding of the major role of the subconscious mind in everyday behaviours, including creativity and decision-making. The subconscious is 'in control' of human behaviours to a far greater extent than we might otherwise (or wish to) think. We can suggest that the subconscious governs most momentary behaviours, whilst the conscious mind selects 'special' moments from memory in retrospect, through kairotic sensemaking, rather than being aware at the time of their significance.

A conceptualisation for a momentary perspective is outlined below. A momentary perspective is a way of gathering, conceptualising, sharing and understanding the human experiences of 'what is going on?' in the moment. A single moment can be interpreted through multiple 'lenses' of knowing, such as those previously described as philosophical, narrative, and cognitive. This section develops a framework for a momentary perspective which can be applied in entrepreneurial creativity and learning, and possibly more generally. This is based on a model of the awareness of 'being in the moment' shown in figure 1.

In the experience of 'being' in the moment, we are constantly perceiving, generating meaning, both consciously and unconsciously, and acting in response, through speech and behaviour, in interconnected ways. This general framework illustrates in a very simplified way these three essential and interdependent processes. These occur both consciously, with selective attention being paid to a small proportion of the sensory data being perceived in the mental 'foreground'; and unconsciously, with awareness of a much wider range of experiential data taking place as 'background'. This conceptualises, in a simplistic way, the complex interactions which occur constantly in the experience of the moment.

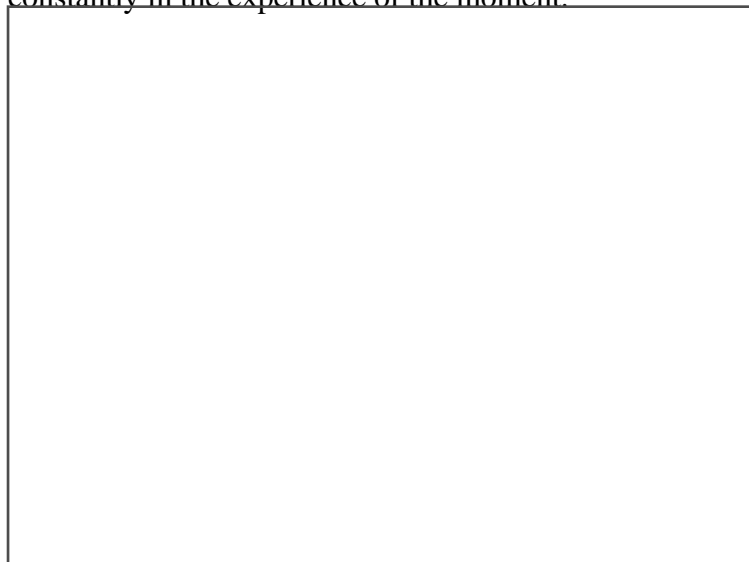


Figure 1: Momentary perspective of 'Being' in the moment. (Rae, 2012)

The moment itself is taken to be an internal realisation separate from any external incident which may trigger it. In the moment, perceptual processes operate both consciously and unconsciously (otherwise described as 'subconsciously'), with unconscious processing being more rapid (Banks & Isham, 2009). The perceptions generate a response, which may be of verbal or physical action which is elicited at the time, and hence likely to be recalled by the person as their response 'in the moment'. An intuitive response is one arising from tacit knowledge not requiring conscious thought, or conditioned by experience or training, whilst an instinctive response results from core animal behaviour or personality. A response often expresses emotion: imagine the response to being hit or being kissed. A conscious response, the result of 'thinking about' how to respond, will be slower, occurring beyond or subsequent to the moment. At any time following the moment, there may be a conscious reflection on the meaning (new knowledge) produced from the moment.

In summary, it can be seen that the moment is constructed in both subjective consciousness of experience, which can be expressed in autobiographical narratives, as well as existing

scientifically as an objectively observed neurological phenomenon, just as time may be taken to be either and both the 'flow' of the *durée* and of chronological Newtonian time. Neither deny the other and both are required to understand the momentary experience. David Lodge, in his novel 'Thinks' (2001) expressed this gap in between the creation of conscious understanding expressed through mindful narrative, and the neural operations of the brain. How we think, feel and behave in the moment, and reconstruct these memories in narratives are at the centre of this matter. The reference to Lodge and the campus novel genre provides a plausible link to our (as yet un)told story.

Dr Harry goes to Grantham

The University-centred narrative has developed a literary tradition; in the UK, the 'campus novel' became established as a sub-genre, starting with CP Snow's 'The Masters' (1951), reaching popularity with Kingsley Amis' 'Lucky Jim', a resonant cultural critique with Malcolm Bradbury's 'The History Man' and its apogee with David Lodge's sequence of novels from 'Changing Places' (1975) to 'Thinks' (2001). Whilst these novels defined a genre which has since waned (Bigsby, 2012), the 'real' narratives of university life have become more complex and contested. Yet for some reason, quite probably that of career survival, academics have been reluctant to use these stories as organisational narratives which can enhance our understanding of 'what *really* goes on'. For there is little doubt that these 'untold stories' could reveal a rich and diverse sociological lifeworld of competing ideologies and contested narratives of politics, power and control, in a 'reality' which many scholars share. This short account is an experimental, and in some ways risky, attempt to elicit 'an untold story' from fragments of organisational narrative gathered from a community of academic folk, in which the role of the 'critical moment' is central to its making.

In the modern university, the recruitment advertising for senior management roles has a seductive discourse including (from a recent THES) 'strong, passionate and empathetic academic leadership', 'ambitious, highly motivated', 'forward-looking, proactive and enthusiastic' and - well, you know the type. There is a form of courtship (or possibly stalking) played by the 'executive search' consultants who extract a lucrative rental from matching the holders of such attributes with the organisations who offer them arenas to perform their prowess - you may know how this works: 'would you be able to advise a suitable candidate?'. But what happens after the anointed superstar leader is courted, seduced and ends up in a marriage of convenience with diverse bedmates? Here is a salutary tale.

Imagine a new university in a traditional English midlands town, somewhere such as Grantham if you will, which did not have a university but where (like the university at Gloucester in David Lodge's 'Thinks') you might conceivably find one. This ambitious university has a Business School - transported from somewhere less glamorous, such as Peterborough, let us say. Grantham Business School has the ambitious rhetoric, the atrium-spanned building and the thrusting professoriate of an up-and-coming institution. Yet its identity, its 'base culture' is a contested one, between the teaching and student-oriented roots of its polytechnic (dread word! no!) origins, shared by the older staff who embody its biography and its corporate aspirations to be a 'Top 40' institution. Recent victims of this cultural tension include a Dean who lost the confidence of the Vice-Chancellor, and a Head of the School who stepped down after realising the 'challenges' of running the School without actual power or a budget were not those he had anticipated.

So it was back to the executive search firm, with their expensive West End office, and in due course, following a 'beauty parade', a candidate with 'charismatic leadership', 'track record' and 'ability to drive change and achieve results' was appointed. Deus ex machina! Let us visit the first meeting between this inspirational figure, whom we shall call Dr Harry, and his (the Business School being an arena where the masculine tends to predominate) Executive Team....

A balding, stocky figure is the centre of attention, and they are laughing. Almost every utterance, every aside he makes produces gut-gurgling chortles from most of the men – for they are mainly men today. He's a comedian! The emotional dimension is of bonhomie, a feelgood, 'up and at'em' approach to picking fights with the University and coming off on top. The new man is streetwise, and picks – or attracts – his lieutenants, finding people who 'know how the place works' and 'can get things done'.

Behind the scenes, this select little group, not 'leading academics' (those who, by and large, are away at conferences or 'writing for the REF') get together to inform a 'review' of the school initiated by the new leader. This will 'drive change', 'take no prisoners' and 'leave no stone unturned'. The review goes on and on, being referred to in every meeting as a kind of magic alchemy, yet never quite being materialised into tangible form. But at first, the teaching staff are heartened by the new man and his ability to entertain as a raconteur and even his organisation of a staff party where he plays guitar and leads a standup band. He's certainly changing the culture, seizing the reins of power....

....and yet, there are 'moments of truth' as symbolic interactions which probe deep into the cultural web of this Business School, reliant as it is on international staff, who are not well paid and depend on insecure work visas for their tenure. We drop into another meeting, on a hot summer afternoon in which our hero has been asked to 'sort out an HR problem'. He is accompanied in his office by one of the 'old hands', a rotund Principal Lecturer who presides with benign dictatorship over the timetabling and staff work allocation. These powerful, stocky men, perspiring through their unbuttoned shirts, confront two women, one Near-Eastern and one African, who are in the 'Catch-22' position of being near the end of their work visas, yet too poorly paid to qualify for an application for permanent residency. Having come to the UK to take their PhDs, their families are settled here, and yet they face the appalling prospect of loss of employment, income and even deportation as a result. They put their case to Dr Harry who, in his symbolic role as Head of School, is their ultimate line manager, protector and advocate...

'So why should we help *people like you* to stay in the UK?' he asks; his rhetorical question chilling the air as it freezes the hearts and hopes of the two women, their eyes widen and faces drop in shock and astonishment. After desultory, inconclusive discussion the meeting ends without conclusion. One woman goes quickly to the Ladies lavatory and bursts into tears, the other stoically collects her bag and coat from her office and starts her long journey 'home' to her daughter. Sitting on the train, she wonders quite what he meant by 'people like you'; clearly not 'people like us' – not male, not white, not English. People 'not like you' are Asian, African, female perhaps; insecure and disempowered, not tenured and powerful. Replaceable.

There are other such moments of truth, symbolic interactions where 'making tough decisions' confronts and confounds the needs and expectations of staff. One of the 'old guard' was told that

‘We don’t need people from Peterborough who’ve always worked in the public sector’, and whose response was, ‘That’s me! So you don’t like people like me!’. Yet a long-serving minority of the staff could be categorised, and antagonised, in such a way. Through a series of interactions of this kind, working relationships were damaged and trust eroded. The same person found that whenever he did not attend the management group of which he was a member, he and his team would be singled out for criticism and blame. This ultimately led to a decision being made, at a meeting at which he was not present, that his team was to be dissolved; but neither he nor his team was to be informed of this.

Amazingly, Dr Harry was rarely confronted about these remarks and actions, but simply blustered on, constantly presenting a narrative of ‘quick wins’: tactical achievements and minor successes. Yet gradually his position was being eroded. He antagonised and lost the confidence of senior managers. A senior professor, retired and called back to manage another problematic department of the university, advised top managers bluntly that the only solution for Dr Harry was ‘a bullet in the back of the head’.

Within the Business School, Dr Harry had done little to bring other professors onto his side. Gradually, staff who were concerned about the corrosive effects of his management style on relationships and colleagues brought this to the attention of senior managers in the university in a steady procession to their offices, and who were then faced with the difficulty of dealing with a Head of School whom they had appointed, yet who was increasingly beleaguered and struggling to retain credibility. Inevitably, rumours started to circulate about his future, and speculation about who might step in to replace him.

Periods of absence and his erratic attendance at meetings did not help; Dr Harry had little time for such niceties. Required to hold objective-setting meetings with members of the professoriate, one such turned up at the appointed time to find Dr Harry tucking into a hearty meat pie and chips. Returning later, Dr Harry observed that he found such meetings ‘a waste of time’, which robbed the discussion of any symbolic value it might otherwise have had. In such ways, the informal goodwill and ‘permission to manage’ through which managers are able to operate was fast ebbing away.

Yet there is one facet of the organisational ecology of university departments and similar communities, which is that they develop rhythmic patterns of practices, behaviours and ways of being which can give them an inherent resilience and ability to survive even crass mismanagement, just as a forest can regenerate surprisingly quickly after a fire. This can manifest itself as a form of organisational autopoiesis, in which a toxin or threat to the ecosystem is gradually eliminated by it (Hall, 2003). So whilst Dr Harry became increasingly isolated, except for a group of like-minded chums who might be referred to as ‘the Men’s Room’, others took on necessary responsibilities and quietly attended to human and relational processes in the interests of the well-being of colleagues, students and the practices of educational management. In this way, the business of the school largely continued without his active intervention and crises were, in most cases, averted, coped with or defused before becoming too serious.

So how do such stories end? There are different plot-lines available. One hears, and occasionally witnesses, a kind of Stalinist purging in some institutions, where senior managers who have fallen

from favour are summoned summarily, to be informed they are to leave (or retire early) 'by mutual consent', with the benefit of that salve of HR conscientious ambiguity, 'the compromise agreement'. Others are given loaded and well-meant advice that it is time to 'seek fresh challenges'. But this story entered a drawn-out yet inevitable end-game. Harry's absences became the norm, whilst his appearances became exceptional, even comedic or disruptive incidents. One such was a meeting with a local dignitary, to whom Harry in a self-aggrandising way outlined his intentions to continue at Grantham, to which the dignitary retorted 'that's not what I've heard!'. This story, of course, rapidly circulated amongst the staff (and students), further contributing to intimations of his departure.

When, inevitably, he announced his intention to 'step down', staff feigned and dissembled emotions of surprise and astonishment; some were 'gobsmacked'. Yet the underlying teleology of the narrative had been inevitable, shaped by both symbolic interactions and an interplay between Dr Harry's choleric behaviour and the self-correcting and compensating mechanisms through which the organisation as a working community protected itself.

Narratives such as this are acted out at different levels, in which none of the actors are ever aware of all that is taking place, nor of the complex interactions between the threads of the story. Also, there are parts of these stories which remain untold; some should not be told; and others, which may have been told, must be reclaimed or 'untold', if this is indeed possible. As in the case of the report by Lord Leveson on press freedom, the term 'redacted' entered the vocabulary as a verb to sanitise the practice, increasingly used, of censoring an account where to reveal to all *what is already known by some*, takes place to protect the dignity or interests of individuals or organisations. So the dénouement and conclusion to this narrative occurred with the realisation that Dr Harry, no doubt in some measure aware of his declining credibility, had managed to find another appointment, but kept this quiet; he had his own 'untold story' which was hidden in the shadow of the told. By disclosing this, he 'seized his moment' and turned the announcement of his departure into a 'winning narrative' in which he had been invited to 'write his own contract' for a post which 'they had kept open as long as I wanted it'. We close this account with a *redacted* version of his own farewell message:

Dear Colleagues,

As many of you now know, I will be leaving the University of Grantham to take up a

Professorship at Newcastle Business School (Northumbria) on July 1st 2013. It is a named Professorship, entitled 'The Norman Wisdom Chair in Comedic Studies', which has come about because of a legacy left by Norman Wisdom, who was a celebrated comedian in the British entertainment industry over many decades. However, Norman was much more than a comedian, he was very passionate about education and research and did a lot of pioneering work in this respect.

Further to this, my new post is a senior Faculty level position through which I will have a leading role in developing research and scholarship across the newly formed Faculty of Business and Law - one of four newly formed Faculties that now make up Northumbria University. This is a very positive and prestigious career step for me, in a city which is just brilliant, and only 30 minutes by train from where I live.

Needless to say, I will be leaving Grantham with a mixture of excitement, anticipation and some sadness, but my experience here has been an invaluable one. On that note, I would like to wish everyone in the School all the very best for the future, and, though challenging times are certainly ahead, I believe many fundamental elements for success are in place, which in most part are a result of the commitment, efforts, and talents of the academics at the 'coal face' who really do deliver this school.

Thank you.

Dr Harry Hill

Discussion

There are a number of issues and questions raised by this narrative which need to be addressed. A primary one is that of risk and moral choice; should the story be left untold; or is harm caused by its telling?

Let us assume that if the events in this narrative 'really happened' in some organisation, then they have been reconstructed in the manner of Watson's ethnographic 'fiction science' (2000), as distinct from being invented, within a mimetic framework of drama imitating life (Bruner, 1990; Czarniawska, 2004). If so, it is possible, if unlikely, that the narrator actually witnessed all of the events which are reconstructed. Rather, let us assume that, if the events took place at all, some of them were relayed by people who were actually present. In that case, the stories of those moments would have already have been shared at least once, and so they cannot be 'untold'; they are 'out there' in the storied life of the organisation. Hence the telling of this story is actually a re-telling of extant fragments in a constructed narrative in which the trajectory of the events reach their conclusion.

Is such a story better left untold? This may depend on whose interests are served by its suppression. This narrative hinges in part on the symbolic moment when the utterance: 'So why should we help *people like you* to stay in the UK?' is made, and its aftermath. This speech act may have seemed trivial, possibly humorous and inconsequential at the time to the speaker. Yet in terms of its effect on the two women, this was anything but the case. Also, in relation to the politics of organisational discourse, it is suffused with latent, possibly unintended meanings of sexism, racism and a denial of help and support for people in a position of powerlessness. Yet had either of them chosen, or felt able to use the story to make a formal complaint about the incident, the position could have been quite different and it could have become a contested moment; one in which there are conflicting narratives over what took place, what was said, and the *context* to these events. The fact that neither woman did so meant that the 'untold story' helped perpetuate the moral consequences of this type of managerial behaviour. Telling the story, however, may help to make such behaviour morally accountable, even if this might be embarrassing for the perpetrator; who of course, may have denied the utterance.

Gabriel (2000: 241) warned of the dangers of occluding '*deeper issues of justice, politics and human suffering*'.

So the moral consequences of telling the story are at least no worse, and arguably better than, leaving it untold. Untold stories are often those of the powerless, those who fear they would not be listened to, or that the consequences of telling the story would be adverse for them. In this way, long-suppressed secrets, such as the sexual abuses by the priesthood and celebrities emerge from their victims many years after the events. The 'cover-up' or suppression of the telling may be as serious a crime as the deed itself.

This moment is symbolic, partly because as actors performing in organisational dramas, we often cannot dissemble in the moment. The actions and speech acts people perform are authentic enactments of their personalities and social identities. Even if the actors themselves do not realise this, those with whom they interact will recognise these 'moments of truth' and the meanings they

convey. There are moral issues; as Watson & Harris (1999) concluded from their work on managerial emergence, managers set moral standards and their behaviours embody moral values. They also noted that the narrator as researcher must also make moral judgements which carry responsibility. Creating and shaping a constructed narrative is a selective process. What is included, excluded, and the ordering of events reflect editorial choices and the underlying intentions behind the story. Narration is not a neutral act but also one in which power is used, or can be misused. This story could be seen as a fictive device used to attack Dr Harry, in which the narrator might deploy language, emotion, humour in describing the moments selected to create an unsympathetic portrayal of the character. However, such characterisation - but to what end? - is an integral part of the writer's work, whether in the genre of novel, history or organisational biography.

Story-making in this way may also be considered a therapeutic process of sensemaking at an organisational level (Weick, 1995). Incidents and interventions of the kind narrated in the story can be emotionally loaded, traumatic and damaging for the individuals and work communities who are involved. People often deal with this on a mundane, daily basis through sharing accounts as organisational gossip. This can function as a process of social coping, a phenomenon which is often evident during periods of organisational trauma. Such stories are told and shared to become part of the collective history of the organisation, possibly enabling the community to reflect, learn and move on from the psychological, emotional and moral damage of the events, actors and interactions concerned.

There must also be a risk that readers will recognise (or think they do) 'real' people, events and organisations behind those in the narrative. This is not a new problem; Watson encountered it in his thinly-disguised organisation 'In Search of Management' (1994). The possible danger or moral hazard can be recounted with two arguments. Firstly, such events are both specific and also fairly typical of the interactions which occur in managerial behaviour in such organisations, so it is legitimate to use them as naturally occurring organisational research resources. Secondly, if the stories and characters are already known, then no further harm should be caused by their sharing in a written narrative. Rather, the intention is that by placing them in a mimetic context removed from the original, the problematic issues and questions they pose can be considered, as intended, in a more detached and generalised way.

The story also aims to demonstrate the ways in which such moments can be symbolic turning points in narratives, in the way Hemingway observed. The deterioration in Dr Harry's managerial authority, and relationships with colleagues, was shown in the story to result from behaviours occurring in such moments. Of course, the story which is constructed is just that – a narrative trajectory from a set of selected events. Alternative constructions of contested moments could equally well be made and be equally valid. Were the character of Dr Harry to offer his, it would doubtless be quite different. Also, the moments when a listener or reader recognises that an 'untold story' is hidden in the shadow of the told and springs out may become significant points in its interpretation, as in the dénouement of Dr Harry's departure.

Conclusion

To observe that moments occur is a commonplace; they constitute the flow and 'twitter' of everyday life. The paper argues and aims to demonstrate that 'critical', 'special' or even 'contested' moments are invested with both symbolic meanings within organisational narratives, and can act as 'turning points' within those narratives, whether or not they seemed to be significant to the people involved at the time. Such moments can be invested with meaning in a range of ways. This paper has closed on the moral dimensions of managerial behaviour in the

moment, as well as the implications of selecting and using 'real' material. There are of course, other dimensions as well, such as dimensions of power and gender.

The construction of time, and the differing ways this can be conceptualised, can alter the meaning and the way in which the moment is used and understood. The story could have consisted of the 'critical moment' in isolation, or juxtaposed with other information, rather than being placed within a linear narrative which provided contextual understanding as well as a teleological plotline. Yet it would be entirely valid to make such alternative choices.

The researcher-as-narrator has responsibility for the choices made in selecting, omitting, placing and connecting moments in stories, in which the decision to 'tell', or 'untell' may be a risky one in terms of morality or personal consequences; 'whistleblowers' rarely prosper in organisations. Yet the story should be able to function as a 'safe' way of making managerial behaviour and practices, for example, morally accountable, and denying the implied power and suppression of 'untold stories' about such incidents.

So as researchers, how do we go forward, in using and interpreting the moment within our work? Carlsen and Dutton (2011: 216), in considering 'generative' (or creative) moments within qualitative research, offered six themes which can provide optimistic and constructive (in both senses) ways forward: *'researchers come alive when turning to not knowing'* (ibid: 232). This may provide hope in the risky and contested territories of our research, in working with the moments we perceive, invest with meaning and act to use in constructing our 'untold stories'.

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